

# IOWA WATERSHED ACADEMY



Jamie Benning  
Water Quality Program Manager  
Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

## Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy

- Created a common water quality goal and emphasis on the watershed approach
- Identified practices that minimize nutrient loss
- Initiated new projects and partnerships to increase statewide and local awareness and implementation
- Increased awareness of existing projects



## Watershed Coordinators

- Watershed project managers
- Variety of backgrounds and experience
  - *Agriculture*
  - *Environmental science*
  - *Conservation*
  - *Sales*
- Needs vary
  - *Location*
  - *Project goals*
  - *Partners*



## Watershed Training in Iowa

- Increased need for watershed coordinator capacity building
- High expectations and focus on the new WQI and existing watershed projects
- Conversations and brainstorming around training development
- Watershed academy concept began to take shape



## Needs Assessment

- Water quality and conservation professionals and stakeholders roundtable was held in December 2014
- Representatives from state and federal agencies, agriculture, conservation and environmental organizations and ISU Extension
- Discussed subject matter, available resources and gaps, and potential training structures
- Developed a list of priority topics and subtopics



## Priority Topics

- Project management
- Measurement and monitoring tools for practice and project effectiveness
- Agronomics and cropping systems management
- Communication and sales
- Watershed and conservation planning
- Developing stakeholder leadership
- Outreach and education planning
- Evaluation
- Source water protection



## Coordinator Assessment

- Conducted a survey of watershed coordinators
- Included topics discussed at the roundtable
- Coordinators ranked topics according to their level of interest and need for each topic



## Funding and Goals

- Received an NRCS grant to support training development and delivery in partnership with SWCS
- Increase project effectiveness through
  - *Strong understanding of tools and resources available*
  - *Developing relationships with technical specialists and partners*
  - *Peer learning*
  - *Continually evolving and improving to meet watershed coordinator, watershed and state-level needs*
- Structured as a two-day hands-on workshop held twice per year
- Workshop presentations and materials posted to the Watershed Resources section of the ISUEO Water Website



## May 24-25, 2016

### Field Extension Lab- Ames

- Nitrogen management
- Cover crops
- Measurement and monitoring tools
- Effective field days
- Project management



## October 20-21, 2016

FFA Enrichment Center- Ankeny

- NRS measurement
- P management
- Soil health tools
- Project management
  - *Evaluation*
  - *Grant writing*
  - *Social media tools*
- Urban practices
- ISA Tour and presentations
- Joint meeting with IA SWCS



## May 9-10, 2017

### Field Extension Lab- Ames

- Communication techniques
  - *Elevator speech*
  - *Working with the media*
  - *PowerPoint*
- Edge-of-Field
  - *Saturated Buffer design and siting*
  - *Wetlands and bioreactors*



## October 24-25, 2017

### Field Extension Lab- Ames

- Conservation and watershed planning
- Conservation sales
- One Water approach
- Conservation Infrastructure
- Story Maps
- Hydrologic and social assessments
- Cover crops
- Soil health measurement



## Evaluations

- Self-assessments on a 1-4 scale
  - Pre-assessments: generally in the needs improvement category (2)
  - Post-assessments: improvement to the proficient category (3)
  - Some exemplary rankings (4) on topics that have been covered at multiple academies or that are more familiar
- Follow-up evaluations indicate lasting value of knowledge gained and topics for future events



## Impact

- 25-33 coordinators attend each session
- Conservation staff, farm advisers, and consultants
- Coordinator turnover is decreasing
- Valuable topics and tools:
  - Tools: ACPF, 360 Soil Scan, retainN kits, saturated buffer and bioreactor models
  - Communication techniques: media training, messaging, social media, and learning from other coordinators
  - Practices: soil health, cover crops, edge-of-field sessions



## Feedback

- “You got my mind thinking of other ways to really look at my watershed & maybe expand my focus area”
- “I personally would recommend the Watershed Academy to both new and veteran coordinators alike. I think the training is well done and look forward to future meetings!”
- “Thank you for doing these! They are a great resource for those of us who feel like we were kind of thrown into our jobs without much training.”
- “I believe the academy is a great learning opportunity and the caliber of presenters is great!”

## What’s Next

- Ongoing assessments with project coordinators, water quality and conservation leaders, and partner organizations in Iowa
- Build connections with other state-led watershed trainings to develop and share resources
- Continue to expand beyond watershed coordinators to other conservation and agricultural professionals including commissioners
- Seek funding to support training development and delivery



## Partners and Sponsors



Thank you!

